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Agee book draws CIA retaliation

INSIDE THE COMPANY: A CIA DIARY

By Philip Agee
Penguin Books, London

out of two articles

recent expose of the CIA by an "insider"—at a time when public attention is focused on its illegal and other operations in the service of imperialism—has thrown the agency into disarray. CIA director William E. Colby has told a House appropriations subcommittee that government prosecutors are investigating the possibility of charging the author, former CIA officer Philip Agee, with treason. Colby said that the government is attempting to determine if Agee's release of classified material—including a list of undercover CIA agents and front groups in Latin America—was intended to harm the United States. The classified material, along with the book, is contained in Agee's recently published book "Inside the Company: A CIA Diary," which is currently a bestseller in the U.K. and Canada. The book has not yet been published in the U.S. And if Colby and government prosecutors have their way, it won't be. Colby says he intends to make it impossible to obtain the book in this country. He will probably attempt to obtain a restraining order if any American publisher is to distribute the book.

This, of course, will not be the first time the CIA has attempted to prevent disclosure of the agency's activities to the American public. Recently, the director and his staff were seen in several newspaper and wire service offices in Washington, D.C., trying to block publication of the CIA's involvement in Operation Jennifer. This operation, known popularly as Operation J, involved the construction of a \$350 million salvage ship at taxpayer's expense by several corporations owned by the mysterious and wealthy multimillionaire Howard Hughes. Officially the ship was created under contract from the CIA under the strictest security arrangements to salvage nuclear warheads and codes from a Soviet submarine sunk near Hawaii. In fact, the ship was also used by the Hughes conglomerate to extract valuable mineral deposits from the ocean floor. Although the bourgeois media did sit on this story for several months, in what the Washington Post called "considered response to the CIA's discreet appeals that publication would spoil a valuable ongoing national security operation," the facts were made public after the director's unprecedented admission.

A few years ago the CIA made another attempt to hide its actions. A CIA executive and soon-to-be-replaced chief of CIA operations in England, Cord Meyer Jr., intervened to stop the publication of "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia" by Alfred McCoy. This book documented a long history of CIA complicity in heroin traffic in Indochina. The book also mentioned deals between the Mafia and the agency. But Meyer's efforts also failed after the publication, in the New York Review of Books, of his outrageous correspondence with McCoy's publishers.

More recently the CIA was partially successful in preventing the disclosure of CIA operations by a former CIA executive, Victor Marchetti. Marchetti, and his coauthor, John Marks, were restrained by a federal court injunction from publishing or expressing certain details of CIA history. In this instance, the book, "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence," was published, revealing an extensive overview of CIA operations and mentality, but at the expense of numerous large blank spaces corresponding to the paragraphs deleted by CIA censors. Although the essence of their message remained intact, the CIA managed to curtail publication of the facts supporting the authors' allegations. This case is still in litigation before the Supreme Court and whether the CIA can continue to block these disclosures remains to be seen. In any event, most journalists and others familiar with CIA operations have made educated estimates of what information the censored paragraphs contained. Several of the more sensational CIA exposes of late have resulted from aggressive investigative reporters attempting to fill in the holes in the Marchetti/Marks book.

The CIA probably realized that in the long-term they could not obstruct the growing demands for the deleted data. The agency's strategic consideration for their action against Marchetti and Marks was to establish legal precedent and political intimidation to prevent other leaks from former agency employees. They might have been somewhat successful with this strategy but for the actions of Philip Agee. He circumvented this measure by having his book published in England where the CIA could not impose censorship. It is in reaction to this fait accompli that Colby is conjuring up charges of treason against Agee.

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the Ford administration is warning against a new "isolationism" opposed to the administration's global strategy, which includes the maintenance of a strong CIA capable of covert intervention "when necessary." Evidently some of these "isolationist" voices believe the CIA is not necessary and in fact may be harmful to capitalism's long-range survival. It is against this background of intense struggle over the best road for imperialism and the role of the CIA within it that we must judge Colby's intent to prosecute Agee and block his book.

With the press and now two congressional select committees probing every secret and convoluted chamber of the CIA and the intelligence community, the administration and the CIA director are, of course, worried that all of the agency's secrets will be revealed. But even more worrisome is the possibility that the agency, its employees, or possibly the administration itself, may become victims of the current debate.

Morale at the CIA is said to be at an all-time low. Resignations are increasing and an attempt is being made by some old hands to form a committee of former intelligence officials to rally public support to the agency's cause.

Colby and this new committee are well aware that exposure of CIA activity will only benefit the CIA's enemies, including this so-called "isolationist" tendency within the ruling class. Congressional critics of the CIA, armed with explicit details of illegal or impolitic CIA operations, could adequately demonstrate the need to curtail or even abolish the agency. Whether the debate will reach such proportions remains to be seen, but Colby's fears are real. Colby knows that foreign affairs, which includes the operations of his agency, has in the past few years become subject to mass pressure and protest. He is aware that if the American public, through the Agee book, there is every reason to believe they could provide the necessary pressure to push the CIA's enemies in Congress into action. What